

Luke 15:11–24 • Searching



Discuss

1. The younger son demands his inheritance while his dad is still alive. How does he view his dad?
2. When he hits rock bottom, he wants to return home, but as a servant. How might a servant get treated?
3. What do you like about how the father responds to his son?
4. Jesus tells this story to describe how much God loves us. Where are you in the story?
 - Far from God.
 - Hitting rock bottom and pondering return.
 - Walking back toward God.
 - Home in God's arms.

Apply

1. Coming home to the father means becoming a follower of Jesus. Let's take a look at what it means to follow Jesus. (Share the Big Story)
2. We hope our friends experience God's love too! Think of 2 friends with whom you can share this story? Can you text them a photo of it right now?

Steps for Leading this Encounter with Jesus

1. Start with a game or activity to get to know each other (15 minutes)

Here are ideas for great bonding activities:

- Food - Bring some great food to share
- Game - Play something quick and fun to draw people in
→ Apples to Apples, HedBanz, UNO, etc.
- Icebreaker - Ask an engaging question to get people talking
→ "Has anyone ever made a major sacrifice for you that surprised you? (or have you?)"

2. Debrief last week's discussion (5 minutes)

Let's take a minute to debrief last week:

- How did you experience Jesus building trust with you or transforming habits in your life this week?
 - How did you try building trust with friends over food this week?
 - What is Jesus teaching you?
- ### 3. Facilitate a discussion about the story (25 min)
- Invite someone in the group to read the story aloud.
 - Ask them what they have questions about (write these down and ask them to the group along the way)
 - Ask the "Discuss" questions.

A few extra questions for going deeper:

- Who do you identify with more—the son who runs away, or the son who stays? In what way?

- Try this—Close your eyes and imagine yourself in this scene.

What do you want to say to the father? What would he say to you? Give yourself a minute to play it out in your mind. (After a minute, ask if anyone would like to share what they imagined).

4. Tell a personal story from your life (5 minutes)

- Tell the story of your own spiritual journey back to the Father's house. How did you experience God's love and choose to follow Jesus? How has your life been different since?
- Better yet, coach someone else in the Encounter Group to share their story!

5. Ask both "Apply" questions and invite everyone to respond (10 minutes)

- Share the *Big Story* and make an invitation to follow Jesus! Make sure you practice this in advance. Print out the Big Story and Call to Faith Outline (intervarsity.org/sites/default/files/resources/bigstory.pdf) so everyone can follow along together. Give everyone a copy and read it out loud. Plan what you'll say if no one responds or if someone does. If no one responds say something like, "Thanks everyone for listening and responding honestly. I'm glad we can have honest conversations about what it means to follow Jesus." If someone does respond say, "Thanks for taking a risk and sharing honestly that you are ready to put your trust in Jesus! I'd love to pray and thank God for your new faith. Let's get some time this week to talk more about what this decision means for you."